

Mental Health and the Ontario Curriculum Elementary

>> Learning about mental health and well being is for all Ontario students and all educators. While there are explicit opportunities to learn about mental health within the curriculum in subjects such as health and physical education. There are also opportunities to incorporate it in a variety of ways across the curriculum. Beginning in kindergarten, there are program expectations for personal and social development. Sometimes that means working in groups.

>> What is this?

>> Potato bug.

>> With an adult.

>> Snapping turtles that are snapping.

>> Can you tell how they snap?

>> Or just working on your own. Skills for self regulation, the ability to monitor and be aware of emotions, behaviours, along with attention starts in kindergarten.

>> Their engine is revving really high and you're getting angry. So you need some quiet time.

>> It's our choice.

>> Supported by classroom educators, students continue to develop self reliance and self awareness throughout elementary grades. Living skills which include learning about themselves and working effectively with others are part of the health and physical education curriculum.

>> Later in life, they will have those coping skills. Just so you know guys, I've just had a really busy day. I'm feeling a little frustrated. I just need to take a break. Want to talk to you but can I -- can you give me 5 minutes? And that's where we want them to feel and to know themselves and I think that's such a key piece in mental well being.

>> Students throughout the elementary grades have opportunities to take ownership of their learning and develop coping skills.

>> You can do yoga. Play on the computer. Look out the window. Play with playdoh.

>> Co-constructing that with the students is really important because then you're selecting strategies that are authentic to them. That have meaning to them and then when they are in the times of stress, then they know where they want to go and what to do.

>> I can lift it over my head.

>> How does it make you feel to do that?

>> Strong.

>> Experts say physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally healthy students are more likely to achieve their full potential. And social and emotional learning lays a foundation for well being.

>> Social and emotional learning is about bringing in strategies into the classroom that teach kids how to manage and identify feelings. For example, so establishing some emotional literacy. Some language about what different feelings are. How to work together and to acquire good social skills and interaction and group opportunities in the classroom. And also giving kids the opportunity to make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes. So through role modelling, through having visuals in the classroom about we have days where maybe we feel stress. And what kind of feelings do I have inside. So building their emotional literacy is something that teachers are very well positioned to help kids with.

>> And that's what Maria Winters is doing with this grade 4 class. Working with learning expectations from the health and physical education curriculum.

>> They need to have strategies that they can use when they're facing something that's challenging. And when they're in that moment where they're feeling nervous or worried or anxious, they need to be able to do something to calm themselves down. To really become reflective on how they're thinking and to really impact their feelings so they can do what they have to do. And you know, that's why we're looking at the problem solving models. And that's why we're looking at building self awareness. You know, what is your body saying to you when you're nervous. What are those little signs like a tummy ache or sweaty palms? What does that mean? Why is that there? So helping them to wonder about why am I feeling worried today? What's going on today that's making me feel this way but what can I do about it? And I think having that sense of control over I can change the way I feel and I can have an impact is really powerful. So I think in the school setting that's building block number 1. Everything follows from there.

>> The results the students, say, are solid.

>> As we were in the finals in basketball and I was doing like a few deep breathing strategies like because I was very nervous.

>> The class includes making connections between physical activity, articulating feelings, and sharing positive reflections.

>> I like the way you're fun to play with and how you like Legos.

>> Students jot down the comments.

>> It made me feel bright and bold and just -- I felt cool.

>> And they can keep the cards as a reminder on days that feel not so bright. It's important to think in advance about opportunities for students to learn about mental health and well being through instruction.

>> Because it's going to come up in literature. It's going to come up in science. It's going to come up in geography. It's going to come up in math. So it just becomes a natural thing to talk about. It's not a subject that we set aside and you know, Tuesday between 10 and 11 we're going to talk about mental health. Because we don't experience mental health or mental ill health. We experience it 24 hours a day.

>> Mike Pearson does some intentional planning of instruction for his grade 6 students with mental health in mind.

>> Well, I try to incorporate the themes such as inclusiveness and stereotyping and all of that into my language program as well.

>> This lesson which integrates learning in the arts, drama, and dance with language includes dramatic role playing and has students thinking about stereotypes.

>> A stereotype, we believe, adults have with teenagers is lazy.

>> And so I think it just gives them -- it makes them feel at ease with themselves which, in turn, makes them feel comfortable, I hope and safe. And then when they are feeling safe and comfortable, then I think they're going to learn more in the long run because if they're feeling down about something, if they're feeling bullied or if they're feeling excluded from all activities, well it's really hard for that student to get involved in learning about the solar system. In grade 9 and being so shy that when I had to walk down --

>> It's not the role of an educator to diagnose or provide mental health services but by developing an awareness and responsiveness, educators can make a greater difference for all students. To see more strategies about helping students learn about mental health and well being, watch the video supportive learning environment. The video continuing the conversation will share with you more information on resources.

